

Countywide Community Forums

Formerly known as King County Initiative 24

Dick Spady, Volunteer Coordinator; John & Jim Spady, Deputy Coordinators

<http://www.metrokc.gov/auditor/CCF>

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**Contact: Jim Spady
206-949-8484**

Successful first round of King County's new citizen-outreach program completed

Almost 500 participate in *Countywide Community Forums* on Transportation

Survey results rank traffic congestion as biggest problem

Seattle – King County asked for citizen input on transportation and got it by the truckload. Almost 500 participated in the new *Countywide Community Forums* (CCF) program from June 28 to July 20. People gathered in homes, businesses, and coffee shops throughout King County to talk about transportation issues and register their opinions through an in-depth survey.

The *Countywide Community Forums* were created to supplement King County's existing public hearing process by making it easier and more convenient for interested citizens who live or work in King County to provide input on the most important public issues facing the county. Unlike random sample polls, the program is open to every interested person in the same way that traditional public hearings are open to everyone. It is thus important to keep in mind that the opinions of almost 500 participants do not necessarily represent the opinions of King County citizens in general.

The results of the survey are summarized below. To obtain a complete copy of the survey results (which, due to time constraints, do not yet include participants' write-in answers or comments), including subtotals based on participants' County Council district, age, gender, race, employment status, education level, family description, time in King County, commute method, length of average commute and/or self-described knowledge of the topic of transportation, please click on this link: [<http://tinyurl.com/6f9l9e>](http://tinyurl.com/6f9l9e).

Survey questions covered issues involving traffic congestion, transit, roads, carpooling, vanpooling, light rail, buses, ferries, tolls, land-use planning and taxes.

Here are highlights from the survey:

- 46 percent rated the current regional transportation system in King County as "fair or average;" 27 percent rated it "poor."

- 51 percent pegged “traffic congestion” as the single biggest transportation issue facing King County; lack of convenient access to transportation options such as mass transit, bike lanes, sidewalks and trails was second at 22 percent.
- “More transit” (35%) and “more roads” (22%) were the two most common solutions proposed by participants.
- Asked to rank their first priority, 47 percent said “add transit services (bus and/or rail)”, followed by “add general purpose lanes to existing freeways and highways” at 26 percent.

OTHER NOTEWORTHY RESULTS:

Question: When a congested highway such as the Alaskan Way Viaduct and/or the Evergreen Point Bridge is replaced, should the road capacity be increased? Forty-three percent (43%) said, “yes,” but only to add HOV/HOT lanes or a rail line. Thirty-one percent (31%) simply said “yes.”

Question: What is the best way to encourage more people to use transit? Forty-one percent (41%) said, “increase the frequency, speed and reliability of service by building rail and or Bus Rapid Transit”, followed by, “increase the scope of service to more areas” (26%).

What about land-use planning? Fully 82 percent said that county and local governments should “encourage more commercial development and retail services in or immediately adjacent to major Transit Centers and Park & Ride lots to give people using these facilities another option to using their cars to access shopping, dining and entertainment. Sixty-six percent (66%) wanted to adopt “land use planning policies that are intended to increase residential population densities and create mixed use, walkable, and transit friendly neighborhoods in urban and suburban areas.” Fifty-eight percent (58%) supported “policies that are intended to increase the availability of affordable housing inside King County’s largest cities (where most people work), and also near Transit Centers and major Park & Ride lots.”

Should King County reallocate some of its transportation budget? Fifty-two percent (52%) were opposed to giving carpool programs a bigger slice of the pie, but 48 percent supported more money for vanpooling (38% were opposed). Sixty-two percent (62%) supported more money for coordinating bus and ferry service, but adding more passenger-only ferry service on Puget Sound and Lake Washington, while popular with over 40 percent of participants, both fell short of majority support.

How should we pay for big new transportation projects? “Tolls on new or upgraded freeways and highways” was the most popular choice at only 28 percent. “Tolls on existing freeways during the most congested times” came second at 18 percent.

What about High Occupancy Toll lanes, also known as “HOT” lanes? The biggest group (43%) wanted to take a “wait and see” approach to see how the state’s new experiment with HOT lanes on State Route 167 (between Renton and Auburn) works out. Others were divided almost evenly, with 28 percent supporting HOT lanes and 23 percent opposing them. Assuming the HOT lane experiment on SR-167 is a success, 62 percent would support converting more HOV lanes to HOT lanes where the HOV lanes are underused. However, a

plurality of 48 percent would oppose building new HOT lanes where the HOV lanes are at full capacity with buses, vanpools and carpools (versus 37 percent who would support new HOT lanes on those corridors).

Variable tolls; which are intended to encourage single occupant drivers to carpool, vanpool, or ride transit, or at least drive less during peak hours, were supported by a slim majority (51%). However, there was no consensus on where this concept should be tested.

Sound Transit received mixed support from the participants. Fifty-three percent (53%) agree with Sound Transit that it wasn't a good idea mixing roads and transit together in one proposal (as was done in last year's failed Proposition One" ballot proposal). Forty-three percent (43%) want Sound Transit to seek voter approval this November for a "transit only" proposal, while 35 percent think Sound Transit should wait until 2010. However, the only part of Sound Transit's likely proposal to earn majority support from the participants is the route from the University of Washington to Northgate (supported by 59 percent of respondents).

When asked how they were likely to vote on a Sound Transit ballot proposition this fall, the participants were almost evenly split. Thirty-eight percent (38%) were "definitely," or "probably" going to vote "no" while 37 percent were "definitely," or "probably" going to vote "yes."

Demographic information:

Forum participants were generally more educated and less diverse than King County's overall population. Almost thirty percent (30%) have post-graduate degrees, and almost as many are four-year college graduates. Eighty-two percent (82%) describe their racial heritage as "White or Caucasian." Eighty-five percent (85%) have lived in King County for at least 10 years; of those 67 percent have lived in King County for at least 20 years. Thirty-five percent (35%) commute in single occupant vehicles, 31 percent do not commute (because they work at home or are a homemaker, retired, or unemployed), 22 percent ride the bus, carpool, vanpool, or use a combination of methods that include transit, while over four percent bicycle, walk or use another non-motorized method to commute.

When it comes to the issue of transportation, over 30 percent of participants described themselves as "well informed" while over 20 percent described themselves as "very well informed." Yet only 23 percent had ever testified before at a King County public hearing or Town Hall meeting.

Overall, participants liked the Countywide Community Forum process of small, conveniently located small group meetings, linked together with an introductory video and a detailed survey. Sixty-three percent (63%) preferred this process to a traditional public hearing or Town Hall meeting. Sixty-three percent (63%) also rated the transportation video as "fair and even-handed" and 64 percent thought the survey covered "most major issues."

Authorized by King County Ordinance 15896 (which enacted the language of Initiative 24) the *Countywide Community Forums* is a network of periodic public forums where participants gather in small groups throughout King County to discuss current issues and provide important feedback to county government. The program is administered by Dick Spady and his two sons, John and Jim who were appointed to serve as the program's first volunteer coordinators. The

program's direct costs are funded with donations, not taxes, and overseen by King County Auditor Cheryle Broom.

To sign up for the next Countywide Community Forum, visit

<http://CountywideCommunityForums.org/>, call 206/296-1633 (or toll free 800/369-2584), or email CommunityForums@KingCounty.gov.

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